

# **KHVARENAH AS THE ONLY (BUT NEGLECTED) LINK WITH KHAETVADATHA**

Dr. Kersey Antia, Sep 9, 2019; updated Oct 5, 2019

An extensive review of the meaning of the word Farrah (Khvarenah) by Gherardo Gnoli in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* makes it clear that literally it stands for “glory,” “splendor,” “luminosity” and etymologically its second meaning is related to good fortune, though H. W. Bailey reversed its traditional interpretation. Zadsparam identifies Khvarenah as “heavenly fire that resides in the Wahram fire and Zarathushtra’s Khvarenah as descended from heaven and becoming manifested in the form of fire.” Gnoli sees it as “a magic or spiritual force that was undoubtedly present in the ancient Iranian conception. A mystical reinterpretation of this conception can be found even in the philosophical or religious thought of Islamic Persia,” as brought out by various writings of Corbin referred elsewhere by me. Gnoli also notes: “It is precisely as a constituent of human and divine nature that the Xvarenah passed into Manichaeism.” As Khaetvadatha is primarily and exclusively associated with the continuation and preservation of one’s Khvarenah, its association with incest or sex blatantly ignores its spiritual basis, however difficult for others, or even for the ancient or contemporary Zoroastrians, to comprehend, thereby inspiring only a few royal or priestly families to practice it despite various exhortations about its utmost spiritual significance and benefits.

It is not surprising therefore that “its spiritual significance is not brought out by most writers on the subject, resulting in most writers on the subject frowning, mocking or ridiculing it. As Shaked observes, this is due to the taboo placed on incest in the modern times.

As Shaked observes, “there certainly were several societies that condoned marriages between first-degree relatives.” However, instead of condoning it, the Persians, at least the Sasanians as we know it, extolled it, there being no such precedence, in the entire human history and as such it is necessary to fathom the reason why. And indeed no historian of Zoroastrianism even comes close to Shaked in doing it. Even so, he admits that Khaetwadatha (Xwedodah) “lends little support to existing theories about the incest problem.” The problem, as I see it, lies in interpreting Khaetvadatha as incest rather than as Khaetvadatha – the act of giving oneself, self-sacrifice (or so) as its literal meaning and as is also generally held by Zoroastrians today, though apparently so very unaware of the practice of Khaetvadatha as to instinctively deny it outright. Shaked comes close to seeing the real intent (or reasoning) behind it -- seeking “a harmony which has its counterpart in the cosmic

order, in the relationship of sky and earth ,” etc. Shaked rightly does not see it as essential for ensuring a “pure Iranian descent,” and as I have mentioned it here and elsewhere this custom seems to have its roots in the Elamite culture since there is no mention of it prior to the Persians settling in Elam and intermarrying with Elamites ultimately becoming a “Persian” race, thus ruling out the notion of preserving the pure

Persian profile or descent. I know of no author on this subject other than Shaked that has tried so hard to explain this practice from a Zoroastrian perspective and we are wiser for it. As he concluded, “it may be a waste of time to look for a utilitarian or functional explanation” for this custom “beyond recognizing their value as delimiting and defining the Zoroastrian community.” Indeed, no better explanation has perhaps been offered on this intriguing custom except perhaps for emphasizing its role in preserving the very unique and quintessentially Persian notion of Khvareh, as noted earlier – a belief that survived even in the post-Sasanian Iran. And as I have mentioned elsewhere the Achaemenid inscriptions formerly regarded as representing the idea of Farohar is now recognized as representing the royal Khvareh (glory), a notion running deep into the Persian psyche.

Seen in this light, Khaetvadatha emerges as a highly spiritual concept so keenly concerned about preserving and perpetuating for posterity the Khvareh within us. So far all the efforts at explaining it by western scholars have focused on concepts other than of Khvareh. Unfortunately, our sad history has not left us a detailed rationale for it, whether it was a symbolic act, whether any rituals were associated with it, etc., but what we are left with, as delineated by me here, would suffice to rule out its linkage with sex in any way we know it as though it is very hard for us today barring any association with sex around it especially as it is interpreted as incest. But in view of our preconceived notions unless it is seen in terms of Khvareh we will not be able to grasp the real notion surrounding the practice of Khaetvadatha.